

House Republican Press Release

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Why State Law Says Yield to Emergency Vehicles



By State Rep. Jack Stone, R-134

Regrettably, some drivers do not show courtesy to emergency vehicles and pull over to let them pass. Just recently, local firefighters responding to a call were obstructed by a driver chugging along, talking on a cell phone and forcing the fire truck to cross a double line on a four-lane road in order to pass.

This is an issue that is important to every one of us in Connecticut who one day may need the services of the police, fire or emergency medical personnel in a hurry. All motorists should do their part to assure that emergency help arrives without delay.

Several years ago, I was proud to sponsor legislation to toughen state law against drivers who fail to yield to an ambulance, police car, fire truck or other emergency vehicle responding to an emergency call of taking a patient to a hospital.

The new law passed the state House and Senate overwhelmingly with support from both Democrats and Republicans.

For the record, the law increased the penalty for obstructing or failing to yield to an emergency vehicle from a maximum of \$50 to **a mandatory \$200 or up to seven days imprisonment or both**. Further, emergency personnel can simply report the driver's license number and a ticket will be issued.

Drivers who fail to pull over for an emergency vehicle expose themselves to these tough penalties, but more importantly they jeopardize lives. Their neighbors, friends and even family members may be counting on emergency service personnel to respond as quickly as reasonably possible in the event of a fire, car accident or health emergency.

Let me share a portion of a recent e-mail I received that was written by an unknown emergency service worker, entitled, "I Wish You Could Know." It conveys better than I could the reason for the law. It asks why people won't yield for a vehicle responding to an emergency. In part, it reads:

I wish you could know what it is like to search a burning bedroom for trapped children at 3 a.m., flames rolling above your head, your palms and knees burning as you crawl, the floor sagging under your weight as the kitchen below you burns.

I wish you could comprehend a wife's horror at 6 in the morning as I check her husband of 40 years for a pulse and find none. I start CPR anyway, hoping to bring him back, knowing intuitively it is too late, but wanting his wife and family to know everything possible was done to try to save his life.

I wish you could be in the emergency room as a doctor pronounces dead the beautiful five-year-old girl that I have been trying to save during the past 25 minutes, who will never go on her first date or say the words, "I love you, Mommy" again.

I wish you could know the frustration I feel in the cab of the engine or behind the wheel of my squad car, my foot pressing down hard on the pedal, my siren wailing and my red lights flashing, as you fail to yield the right-of-way at an intersection or in traffic. When you need us, however, your first comment upon our arrival will be, "It took you forever to get here!"

I wish you could understand what it feels like to have a little boy tugging at your arm and asking, "Is Mommy okay?" Not even being able to look in his eyes without tears from your own as you hold him close to you to protect him from reality.

Appreciate and support the local EMT workers, 911 dispatchers, firefighters and law enforcement officers in your area.

One day we could very well be saving your property or your own life.

When you see us coming with lights flashing and sirens blaring, move out of the way quickly. Then pray for us!

The writer clearly enunciates why we have this law. Lives are at stake. I hope people reading this e-mail will be more willing to pull over and let the police, firefighters or emergency medical technicians reach their destination.

Those who don't will be fined, and more importantly they may cost the lives of fellow citizens.

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State Rep. Jack Stone serves the 134th Assembly District of Fairfield and Trumbull in the state House of Representatives. He is ranking member of the legislature's Public Safety and Homeland Security Committee.

Editors, the complete text of the e-mail, "I Wish You Could Know" follows:

I Wish You Could Know.....

I wish you could know what it is like to search a burning bedroom for trapped children at 3 AM, flames rolling above your head, your palms and knees burning as you crawl, the floor sagging under your weight as the kitchen below you burns.

I wish you could comprehend a wife's horror at 6 in the morning as I check her husband of 40 years for a pulse and find none. I start CPR anyway, hoping to bring him back, knowing intuitively it is too late. But wanting his wife and family to know everything possible was done to try to save his life.

I wish you knew the unique smell of burning flesh, the taste of soot-filled mucus, the feeling of intense heat through your turnout gear, the sound of flames crackling, the eeriness of being able to see absolutely nothing in dense smoke. Sensations that I've become too familiar with.

I wish you could read my mind as I respond to a building fire "Is this a false alarm or a working fire? How is the building constructed? What hazards await me? Is anyone trapped inside?"

Or to the 911 call. "What is wrong with the person? Is it minor or life-threatening? Is the caller really in distress or is he waiting with a 2 X 4 or a gun for my arrival?"

I wish you could be in the emergency room as a doctor pronounces dead the beautiful five-year old girl that I have been trying to save during the past 25 minutes, who will never go on her first date or say the words, "I Love you Mommy" again.

I wish you could know the frustration I feel in the cab of the engine or behind the wheel of my squad car, my foot pressing down hard on the pedal, my siren wailing and my red lights flashing, as you fail to yield the right-of-way at an intersection or in traffic. When you need us, however, your first comment upon our arrival will be, "It took you forever to get here!"

I wish you could know my thoughts as I help extricate the lifeless girl of teenage years from the remains of her automobile. "What if this was my daughter, sister, my girlfriend or a friend? What will her parents reaction be when they open the door to find a police officer with his hat in hand and eyes lowered to the ground?"

I wish you could know how it feels to walk in the back door and greet my parents and family, not having the heart to tell them that I nearly did NOT come back from the last call.

I wish you could know how it feels dispatching police officers, firefighters and EMT's out to a call. When we call them on the radio and our heart drops because no one answers

back or to hear a bone chilling 911 call of a child or wife needing assistance.

I wish you could feel the hurt as people verbally, and sometimes physically, abuse us or belittle what I do, or as they express their attitudes of "It will never happen to me."

I wish you could realize the physical, emotional and mental drain. The missed meals, lost sleep and forgone social activities. The disregard for human life by one person to another. The burnt flesh, the broken bones, the lifeless bodies and the shattered dreams. The horror and the tragedy that my eyes have seen, my hands have felt and that my mind relives.

I wish you could know the brotherhood and compassion of helping save a life or having to take one. Preserving someone's property, being there in time of someone's crisis, or creating order from total chaos. To hold in your hands the new life that you helped deliver or the lifeless one that you took away.

I wish you could understand what it feels like to have a little boy tugging at your arm and asking, "Is Mommy okay?" Not even being able to look in his eyes without tears from your own as you hold him close to you to protect him from reality. Or to have to hold back a long time friend who watches his buddy having CPR done on him as they take him away in the Medi-vac Unit, knowing all along he did not survive. A sensation that I have become too familiar with.

I wish that you could experience the chill that courses through my body as I try to revive my partner who has answered the final bell, responded to the final call or confronted the armed criminal in the dark alley. Or to turn out in full department dress and hear the bagpipes mournful blare, the shrill sound of taps being played and the soul wrenching sound of "21 guns" saluting one of your own.

Unless you have lived with this kind of life, you will never truly understand or appreciate who I am, who we are, or what our job really means to us.....I wish you could though.

Keep sending this on. Appreciate and support the local EMT workers, 911 dispatchers, firefighters, and law enforcement officers in your area.

One day we could very well be saving your property or your own life. When you see us coming with lights flashing and sirens blaring, move out of the way quickly. Then pray for us!